

NAU ARCHAEOLOGY

Report No. 1223

An Archaeological Excavation at West Winch Common, Norfolk as part of the Puny Drain Diversion.

HER 49130 WHW

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BAU 1443

Contents

Summary

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Geology and Topography
- 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 4.0 Methodology
- 5.0 Results
- 6.0 The Finds
- 7.0 Conclusions

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

- Appendix 1a: Context Summary
- Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table
- Appendix 2: Finds by Context
- Appendix 2b: NHER finds summary table
- Appendix 3: Pottery
- Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material
- Appendix 5: Catalogue of other metal objects
- Appendix 6: Faunal Remains

Figures

- Fig.1 Site location
- Fig.2 Plan of features [1] and [5]
- Fig.3 Sections 1 and 2.

Plates

- Plate 1 Shallow hollow [1] looking north.
- Plate 2 Shallow hollow [1] looking east.
- Plate 3 Pit [5] looking north.
- Plate 4 Pit [5] looking east. Close up of brick structure [7].

Location: South Lynn
District: Kings Lynn/West Norfolk
Grid Ref: TF 61542 15853 – TF 61547 15857
HER No.: 49130 WHW
Date of Fieldwork: 23rd October 2006

Summary

As part of the Puny Drain Diversion Project, NAU Archaeology undertook a small archaeological excavation on agricultural land in the Nar Valley to the west of West Winch. The specific work was in advance of an access road construction, designed to enable further Puny Drain alteration, and specifically, the creation of a new compound. A Post medieval pit and a large shallow depression were recorded as part of the work. The shallow depression was a probable natural hollow filled with cultural material of medieval date, probably derived from the manuring of the land. This excavation indicates that there is probable medieval settlement in the vicinity. These results tie in with the overall aims of the Puny Drain Diversion Project to look for evidence of Medieval settlement.

1.0 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The specific site covered by this report was situated at the western side of the River Nar towards the western end of the Puny Drain Diversion Project. The site was only several metres across, and was limited to the immediate vicinity of two darker soil anomalies. These darker anomalies were first noted by the developer May Gurney.

The Puny Drain Diversion Project was instigated by Scott Wilson as a project design for a series of Archaeological investigations, after a commission by English Partnerships. Scott Wilson funded this small excavation and report as part of the on-going overall aims of the Puny Drain Diversion Project.

The present archaeological excavation was undertaken in accordance with a Project Design prepared by Scott Wilson in consultation with Andrew Hutcheson (Head of Archaeological Planning, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology) and the Regional Scientific Advisor for English Heritage, Jane Sidell.

Full planning permission for the scheme was granted in March 2006 with the condition that no development or other operations shall take place on site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. The archaeological work was in accordance with a written scheme of investigation that has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme was designed to ensure that any items or features of archaeological interest are properly recorded in accordance with Policy ENV.13 of the Norfolk Structure Plan, 1999, and policy 4/10 of the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Local Plan, 1998.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site is situated around two kilometres south of Kings Lynn, with the solid geology of the area consisting of Upper Jurassic Kimmeridge clay. Overlying this there is a series of marine silts and freshwater peat's which fill the Fenland Basin (Silvester 1988, 6-7). A series of ten boreholes were excavated along the proposed route of the Puny Drain Diversion and the results were presented in a report prepared by the Baptie Group (June 2004). These results were reviewed by Scott Wilson in August 2004. At the western end of the site a borehole presented a surface deposit of soft orange brown clay, representing reclaimed deposits, overlying black fibrous peat. Some boreholes also showed a further lower layer of peat. Boreholes at the eastern end of the site had only natural silts, sands and clays with no peat horizons. The heavy clay rich topsoil had been stripped off the site of the present excavation prior to the work commencing. It had an average thickness of 0.30m. Drainage, as expected in this low lying fen edge, was very poor.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

It is currently thought that in the Later Prehistoric and Romano-British periods, the survey area was one of marshland interspersed with natural channels and creeks. This was prior to the reclamation of the area, and as such archaeological activity seems sparse. Earlier prehistoric remains may well be concealed by the later build-up of peat which formed in the boggy conditions. Fieldwalking in the area as part of the Fenland Project Survey (Silvester 1988) failed to find prehistoric material. Two suggested ring ditches (NHER 22505) seen as cropmarks situated near the middle part of the Puny Drain are now, without supporting evidence, thought to be later features. One sherd of Romano-British pottery was found to the north east of Golden Bell Cottage, and a handful of sherds were recovered from field survey early in 2006, at the far western extent of the Scheme. One bronze stud was recovered by metal detecting to the south of the Scheme near to Narside Bungalow. There is no other evidence for occupation in the area at this time. It is possible that a wide band of silt observed running east to west (c.0.5km south of the proposed Puny Drain alteration) may be the former course of the River Nar, (Silvester 1988), but this is has not been confirmed as yet.

In the Saxon and Medieval periods, the area of the project was in the centre of the wetland zone known as 'The Lenn'. This consisted of land gradually reclaimed by the construction of a series of east-west orientated sea banks. One such bank is thought to cross from West Winch to the Nar (300m to the south of the line of the proposed drain diversion) (Ashwin 2000). The Green Dyke is also associated with Late Saxon/medieval land reclamation. It is mentioned in a document of 1379 as running from Hardwick Causeway (now the A47) to Jerry's Dam (Clarke's Chase on modern maps). In places it forms the current parish boundary between South Lynn and West Winch, and is thought to represent the eastern bank of the reclaimed land at that time. The nearest major settlement of West Winch appears in the Domesday survey (AD 1086) as having a recorded four holdings. In fields close to West Winch, Late Saxon metalwork including a bridle side link have been found using metal-detector (NHER 3374). By the medieval period West Winch sat in an area of reclaimed land and a great house or hall, evidenced from the field name 'Hall Piece', stood on the western edge of the village (NHER 3374). Aerial

photographs from the 1960's reveal Medieval landscape features consisting of a moat and field boundaries (NHER 23030), and field walking in 1986 recovered Medieval pottery (Various NHER including 22503 and 22504 and 22507). Sparse scatters of medieval pottery and metalwork (NHER 22393) were also recovered during the Fenland survey (Silvester 1988). To date there are no concentrations large enough to suggest settlement activity, thus it is likely the finds relate to the manuring of fields and/or reclamation during this period.

It is suggested that the current position of the Puny Drain, including its confluence with the Nar, is a 17th century diversion and part of a larger drainage programme of that time. Sykes (2000) suggests (partly based on abutments given in a 1577 town survey) that the medieval course of the Puny ('the Old Peweneye') ran north - east along the line of the Ely and Lynn Railway. The railway destroyed much of the evidence, though clues can still be traced on various Ordnance Survey maps including the 1st and second editions. More recent archaeology includes the converted St Helen's Church, which was constructed of flint in 1863, on the eastern side of Saddlebow Bridge.

The suggested line of the Puny Drain diversion crosses the East Anglian Railway. The Lynn and Ely Railway was opened in 1847 and some elements of this are now Grade II Listed. Clarke's Drove Siding, also known as the Setchey Oil Railway, ran between two oil mines and joined the main line near to the route of the proposed drain diversion. It was in use between 1920 and 1954 and the route of it can be traced on Ordnance Survey maps.

An NHER search for the area immediately around the excavation revealed the following results:-

Several hundred metres to the south a Medieval sandstone button mould was found in 1973. (NHER 14671).

Just to the south of the site concentrations of Post-medieval pottery were found on the side and top of a bank. This may represent a rodden or earlier course of the river Nar. (NHER 20881).

4.0 Methodology

The general project objectives were to:-

Identify the presence/absence of archaeological remains.

To determine the likely range, quality and quantity of artefactual and environmental evidence present;

To determine the general distribution of prehistoric, Roman and Post-Roman evidence within the proposed scheme alignment;

To provide further data from fieldwalking and geophysical survey.

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological deposits and/or features.

After this particular localised area of the Drain Diversion was stripped of its topsoil by the contractors May Gurney, two darker stains were observed, and NAU Archaeology were asked to investigate and if necessary excavate them. By doing so the general project designs were met. Both of the darker stains were of archaeological value and were hand dug by the author and a colleague.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level of 4m OD was taken from an Ordnance Survey map contour (Ordnance Survey Explorer Map No 236 *Kings Lynn, Downham Market and Swaffham*) and checked using a GPS unit.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

The access to the site was good and the teams encountered from May Gurney were helpful towards the completion of the project. The weather was cloudy but dry.

5.0 Results (Fig. 2 and 3) and Plates 1 to 4

Two Features were excavated during the current work. One was a pit ([5]) with evidence of a drilled drain ([8]) at the base, and the other was interpreted as a shallow depression ([1]), filled with cultural material. It was thought to be too large to be a truncated pit.

Feature [1] was given a cut number to ease of recording, though it was probably a natural hollow and not a deliberate 'cut' as such. It was 0.10m deep at its deepest part, and it measured 4m east to west and 3.75m north to south. It had a sub oval shape and was irregular on its northern side probably due to disruption by ploughing. It had shallow gently sloping but slightly irregular sides. It had a gentle break of slope at the top and the break of slope was non-perceptible at the base. The base was roughly flat.

It was filled with ([2]) which was a friable dark grey clayey silt with occasional large fragments of handmade brick (some was kept for examination), occasional shell fragment of various types including whelk and oyster, occasional animal bone fragments and occasional sherds of pot. The darkness of the fill probably indicated that the deposit contained a moderate amount of charcoal, although this was well mixed in and only an occasional fleck was seen. At the north side of the feature the fill became lighter, slightly greenish grey in hue, and had more flecks of charcoal present. The amount of inclusions within the fill indicated that it probably arrived here via deliberate dumping as a charcoal rich dump of waste material. This was probably due to the manuring and working of the field. The ceramic recovered from the fill is typical domestic pottery of 12th to 15th century date.

Pit [5] measured 2.20m across east to west, 1.60m north to south and 0.40m in depth. It was sub oval in shape. It had gently sloping sides which sloped at 30 degrees from the horizontal axis tapering to a rounded base. The break of slope at the base was non-perceptible and at the top it was gradual. The eastern side and top of the cut had a small bonded brick structure ([7]) built against it, which probably acted as a localised 'reinforcing' of sorts. It was composed of reddish orange local handmade bricks measuring 250mm by 100mm by 60mm and they were bonded together by a soft brownish grey mortar with no major inclusions.

The structure was at least 0.60m in size north to south and 0.45m wide formed of two lines of brick two courses thick. The structure may have a date range of mid 16th to late 18th century. The pit [5] was filled with a mid-brownish grey silty clay ([9]) which contained moderate amounts of small brick and mortar fragments 1-30mm in size.

Disrupting the base of the pit was a later drilled land drain [8]. The drain pipe was unobserved because the base of the drain was not emptied. The drain could be seen entering a drainage ditch at the edge of the field to the south. It was filled with two deposits [6] and [10]. At the base it contained [10] which was a dark grey silty clay which included moderate brick fragments. Above this was ([6]), a mid brown silty clay with no inclusions.

Both features [1] and [5] were observed cutting through an orange brown silty clay subsoil [4]. This orange brown silty clay was interpreted as the reclaimed land deposits mentioned in the Geological background. No natural or underlying peat was encountered during this excavation.

6.0 The Finds

Introduction

The finds and environmental material from the site is presented in tabular form with basic quantitative information in Appendix 2: Finds by Context.

In addition to this summary, more detailed information on specific finds and environmental categories is included in separate reports below. Supporting tables for these contributions are included in the Appendices.

Particular objects or small finds are listed in Appendix 2: Finds by Context, and are catalogued in more detail in Appendix 7: Small Finds. They may also form the subject of individual reports included below.

Pottery

By Lucy Talbot

The site produced twenty-six fragments of medieval and post medieval pottery, weighing (0.499kg).

Methodology

The assemblage was quantified (counted and weighed) by form and fabric (see Appendix 3). Identification of the fabrics was based on the typology of Norwich ceramics established by Jennings (Jennings 1981).

Medieval and Post medieval Pottery

Twenty two sherds weighing 380g were recovered from two contexts. The majority of the sherds came from the fill of a shallow hollow ([1]), which contained 14 sherds of glazed Grimston Ware including several sherds from a face jug, a sagging base sherd and ten body sherds. A single unglazed body sherd was also found along with one unprovenanced sherd of shelly ware. The hollow also contained four sherds of LMU (local medieval unglazed ware) including a bowl rim and a single sherd of LMT (later medieval transitional ware). Post medieval sherds were also recovered from the fill of a pit ([5]) which contained a single body sherd of Bourne Ware, imported from Bourne, Lincolnshire, and drain ([8]) which contained two body sherds of LMT.

The pottery represents a small, low status domestic assemblage of local coarse wares, the majority dating to the 12th to 15th centuries. The assemblage contains no high status non local imports. The presence of an import from Lincolnshire is consistent with the west Norfolk location of the site.

Ceramic Building Material

By Lucy Talbot

The site produced four examples of medieval, post-medieval and modern ceramic building material weighing 3.253kg.

Methodology

The assemblage was quantified (counted and weighed) by form and fabric (see Appendix 4). The fabrics were identified by eye and the main inclusions noted. Fabric descriptions and dates are based on a provisional type series established by Sue Anderson formerly of the Suffolk Unit.

Medieval

The site produced two examples of brick and roof tile of thirteenth to fifteenth century date (0.689kg). The brick sample is made of fine estuarine clay fired to a purplish orange colour with sunken margins and coarse inclusions of grog and vegetable matter. A single piece of plain pale yellow roof tile was also recovered and too is made using fine estuarine clay but with fewer visible coarse inclusions.

Post medieval

A single complete brick was recovered from context [07]. The fabric is a fine estuarine clay fired to a pinkish orange with sparse inclusions of finely crushed chalk, shell and ferrous pellets. Measurements of the brick are recorded in the archive. The main feature of this artefact is the presence of a clearly defined diagonal 'skintling' mark.

A skintling mark or hack mark is a raised diagonal or horizontal mark across the long side of some bricks, dating from the mid 16th century to the late nineteenth century. The mark is produced as a result of how the bricks were stacked for initial air drying prior to firing.

Discussed in a document 'The Norfolk Skintling survey – Results 1995-2003', based on research by Elizabeth James suggests that an almost secure date for a building can be based on whether the skintling marks, where present, appear either diagonally or horizontally. Diagonal Skintling marks indicate a date range of the mid sixteenth century to before 1780 and horizontal marks from 1770 to the late nineteenth century.

Miscellaneous

A fragment of modern yellow land drain was also recovered (0.094kg)

Metal Working Debris

A single fragment of copper alloy waste was recovered (0.078kg).

The faunal remains

By Julie Curl

Methodology

All of the bone was examined primarily to determine range of species and elements present and the amount of material that could produce measurable,

ageable and countable data. The scan and assessment were carried out following a modified version of guidelines by English Heritage (Davis, 1992). A note was also made of butchering and any indications of skinning, horn working and other modifications. When possible a record was made of ages and any other relevant information, such as pathologies. Counts and weights were noted for each context examined. All information was recorded on the faunal remains recording sheets. A table giving a summary of the information is included with this report.

Results and discussion

A total of 0.395kg of faunal remains, comprising of ten pieces, was recovered from excavations at West Winch Common. Two contexts, one pit fill and topsoil, produced bone. All of the faunal assemblage is in good condition, although quite fragmentary due to butchering.

Pit fill [2] produced the majority of the bone, which consisted of a complete sheep humerus that bears cut marks from the removal of the meat. Also in [2] were the remains of a variety of butchered cattle bones. The bones in context [2] appear to be derived from secondary butchering and food waste and suggest domestic refuse.

The bone from topsoil [3] consists of butchered humeri from cattle and sheep and again are indicative of food waste.

Recommendation for further work

No further work is needed on this particular assemblage.

The Metalwork

By Julia Huddle

Six items were recovered on site from two contexts (see Appendix 5 below). A roughly rectangular-shaped bar of copper alloy is perhaps a bar ingot, its uneven surface may however point to it being scrap metal and may be a discarded fragment which has escaped recycling. It was recovered from Context 2, which produced 12th – 15th century pottery. A piece of badly corroded iron (undiagnostic) and two lead sheets were also recovered from here. The lead sheets may be offcuts intended for recycling or may have been used to repair buildings such as guttering, plumbing or roofing. A further two pieces were from subsoil (context 3) one of which has a nail hole, a common feature on lead sheeting.

The presence of a possible bar ingot or piece of scrap metal is noteworthy. However there was no other evidence recovered from the Evaluation to suggest metalworking was taking place on site.

7.0 Conclusions

There are limited conclusions to be drawn from Pit [5]. In spite of its purpose remaining unknown, the pit does indicate that there was settlement close enough to warrant its creation, and the construction of the small brick structure [7]. The presence of a skintling mark on a brick from the structure does give a reasonably early post medieval date range of mid 16th to late 18th century. The brick structure [7] may be the remaining part of a once larger structure with an associated pit

lying below, or it could have been, as it now appears, a small reinforcing structure on the edge of the pit.

The shallow hollow [1] was probably natural in origin. Fragments of pottery and other domestic waste of a typical West Norfolk medieval type was dumped on the field as a by-product of domestic life and possibly as part of manuring the fields. There were probably various dumps of this kind across the field, and this collection of dumped material has only survived later mixing and ploughing due to its extra depth within the hollow. The nature of the domestic life is indicated by the unexceptional and local nature of the wears encountered, a fragment of Lincolnshire pottery being the most 'exotic' find. This 'feature' does indicate that there is general medieval settlement nearby.

Features [1] and [5], both indicate that there was nearby medieval and Post medieval settlement. The Golden Ball Farm, situated close-by, could possibly have had a forerunner, and settlement may have been located here since the area was initially reclaimed in the medieval period. A sandstone button mould, discovered in the locality, (found in 1973, NHER 14671), does add extra weight to the idea that a settled life was being lived in the vicinity.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank his co-worker on site, Steve Morgan. Thanks are also due to Kevin Taylor and the staff of May Gurney for their help in completing the project. David Dobson worked on the illustrations and formatted the report. Andy Hutcheson edited the report. Lucy Talbot processed the finds, examined the ceramic and the collected brick. Julie Curl examined the faunal remains, and Julia Huddle looked at the metal objects.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Cut	Shallow hollow	Medieval
2	Fill	Fill of [1]	Medieval
3	Deposit	Reclaimed land-orange clay subsoil	Medieval
4	Deposit	Topsoil	-
5	Cut	Oval pit	Post-medieval
6	Fill	Fill of [8]	Post-medieval
7	Masonry	Reinforcing structure	Post-medieval
8	Cut	Cut of sub-surface drain	Post-medieval
9	Fill	Fill of [5]	Post-medieval
10	Fill	Fill of [8]	Post-medieval

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Medieval (1066 to 1539AD)	Shallow hollow	1
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)	Pit	1
	Drain	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
2	Pottery	22	0.415	Medieval/ Post Medieval
2	Ceramic Building Material	1	0.617	Medieval
2	Iron Nail	2	-	-
2	Metal Working Debris	1	0.078	-
2	Stone	1	1.290	-
2	Animal bone	-	0.361	-
2	Shell – oyster/ whelk	-	0.191	-
3	Animal bone	-	0.034	-
3	Shell - oyster	-	0.060	-
2	Bar	1	0.0 77g	Medieval
2	Formless fragment	1	-	Medieval
2	Sheet	1	2. 45g	Medieval
3	Sheet	1	0.042g	N/A
7	Ceramic Building Material	1	2.470	Post Medieval
9	Pottery	3	0.043	Medieval
9	Ceramic Building Material	1	0.094	Modern
10	Pottery	1	0.041	Post Medieval
10	Ceramic Building Material	1	0.072	Medieval

Appendix 2b: NHER finds summary table

Period	Material	Q Quantity
medieval (1066 to 1539AD)	pottery	25
	brick	1
	roof tile	1
	animal bone	10
		0
post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)	pottery	1
	brick	1
modern (1900 to 2050 AD)	land drain	1

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (g)	Object Date
2	LMU	Bowl rim	1	0.053	11 th -14 th
2	LMU	Body sherd	3	0.038	11 th -14 th
2	Medieval shelly ware	Body sherd	1	0.006	12 th – 13 th
2	Grimston unglazed	Body sherd	1	0.057	L.12 th – 14 th
2	Grimston glazed	Handle	1	0.008	13 th -14 th
2	Grimston glazed	Jug rim	1	0.021	13 th -14 th
2	Grimston glazed	Base	2	0.046	13 th -15 th
2	Grimston glazed	Body sherd	10	0.122	13 th -15 th
2	LMT	Body sherd	2	0.064	15 th -L.16 th
9	?Bourne	Body sherd	1	0.014	13 th -16 th
9	Grimston glazed	Body sherd	2	0.029	13 th -15 th
10	LMT	Base	1	0.041	15 th -L. 16 th
TOTAL			26	0.499	

Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Context	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
2	Brick	1	0.617	Medieval
7	Brick	1	2.470	Post Medieval
9	Land drain	1	0.094	Modern
10	Roof tile	1	0.072	Medieval
TOTAL		4	3.253	

Appendix 5: Catalogue of Other Metal Objects not Small Found (either late post-medieval or undiagnostic)

Context	Context Description	Ceramic Spot date	Object date	Material	Object Name	Description
2	Fill of hollow	12 th /15 th c	Un-diagnostic	Copper Alloy	Bar	Roughly rectangular-shaped piece of copper alloy. ?Bar ingot. 77g
2	Fill of hollow	12 th /15 th c	Un-diagnostic	Iron	Formless fragment	Badly corroded
2	Fill of hollow	12 th /15 th c	Un-diagnostic	Lead	Sheet	Cut sheet fragments x 2. 45g
3	Top soil	N/A	Un-diagnostic	Lead	Sheet	Cut sheet fragments x 2, one with (?nail) hole. 42g

Appendix 6: Faunal Remains

Context	Total context weight (kg)	Total context quantity	Species	Species quantity	Comments
2	0.361	8	Cattle	4	Butchered calcaneus, metatarsal, tibia and fibula
2			Sheep	2	Cut humerus, mandible
2			Mammal	2	Butchered fragments
3	0.034	2	Cattle	1	Chopped humerus
3			Sheep	1	Chopped and cut humerus

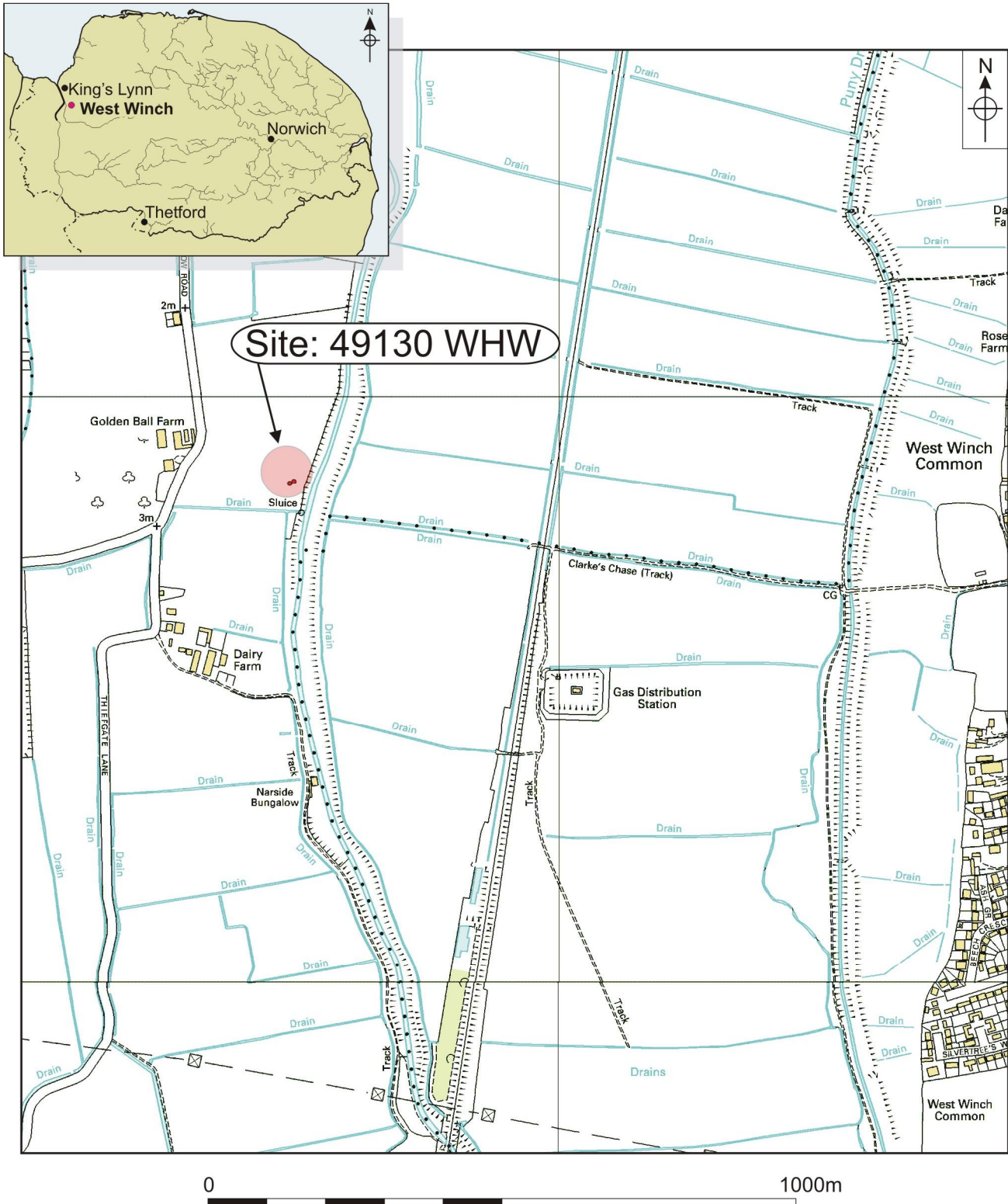


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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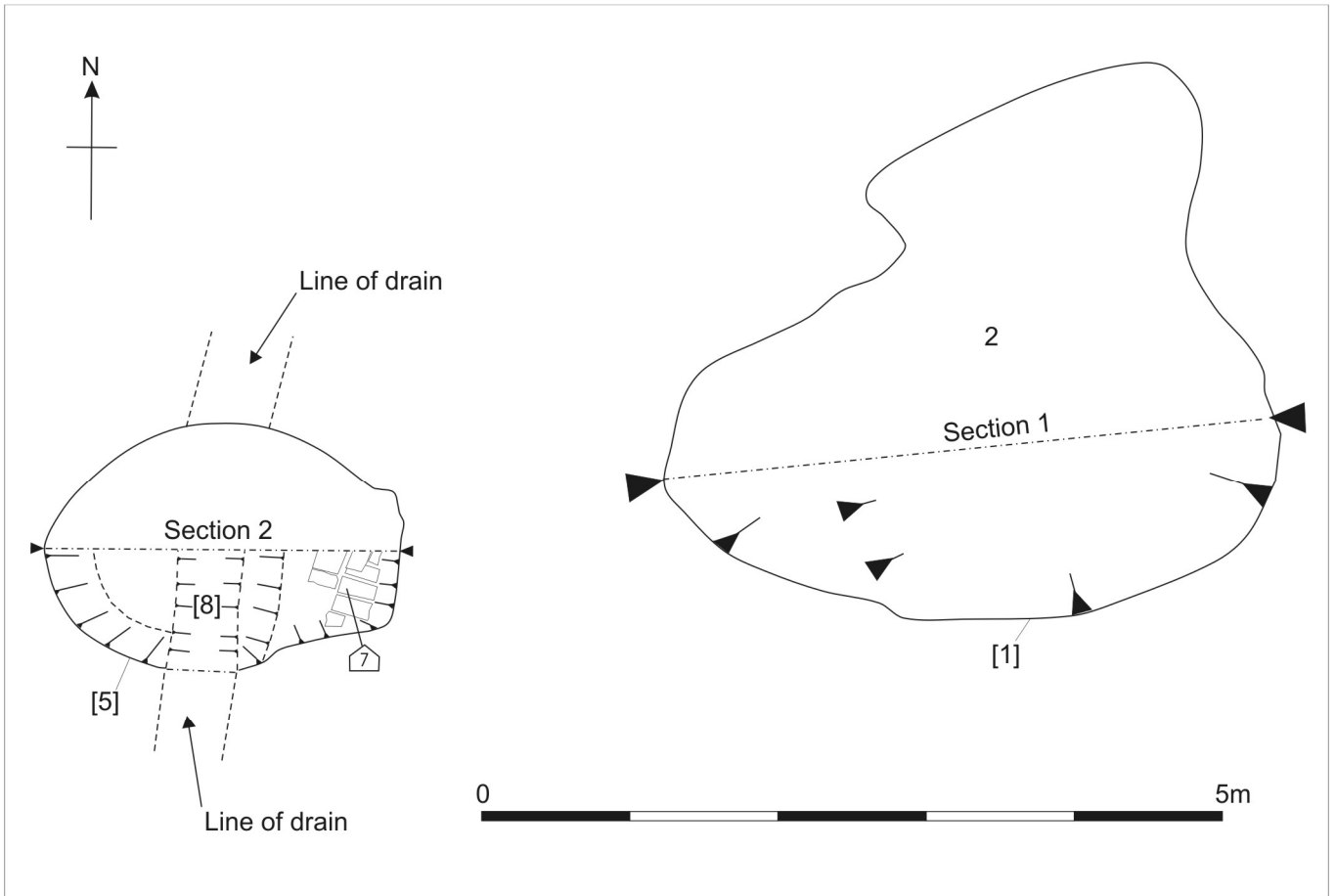


Figure 2. Plan of features [1] and [5]. Scale 1:50

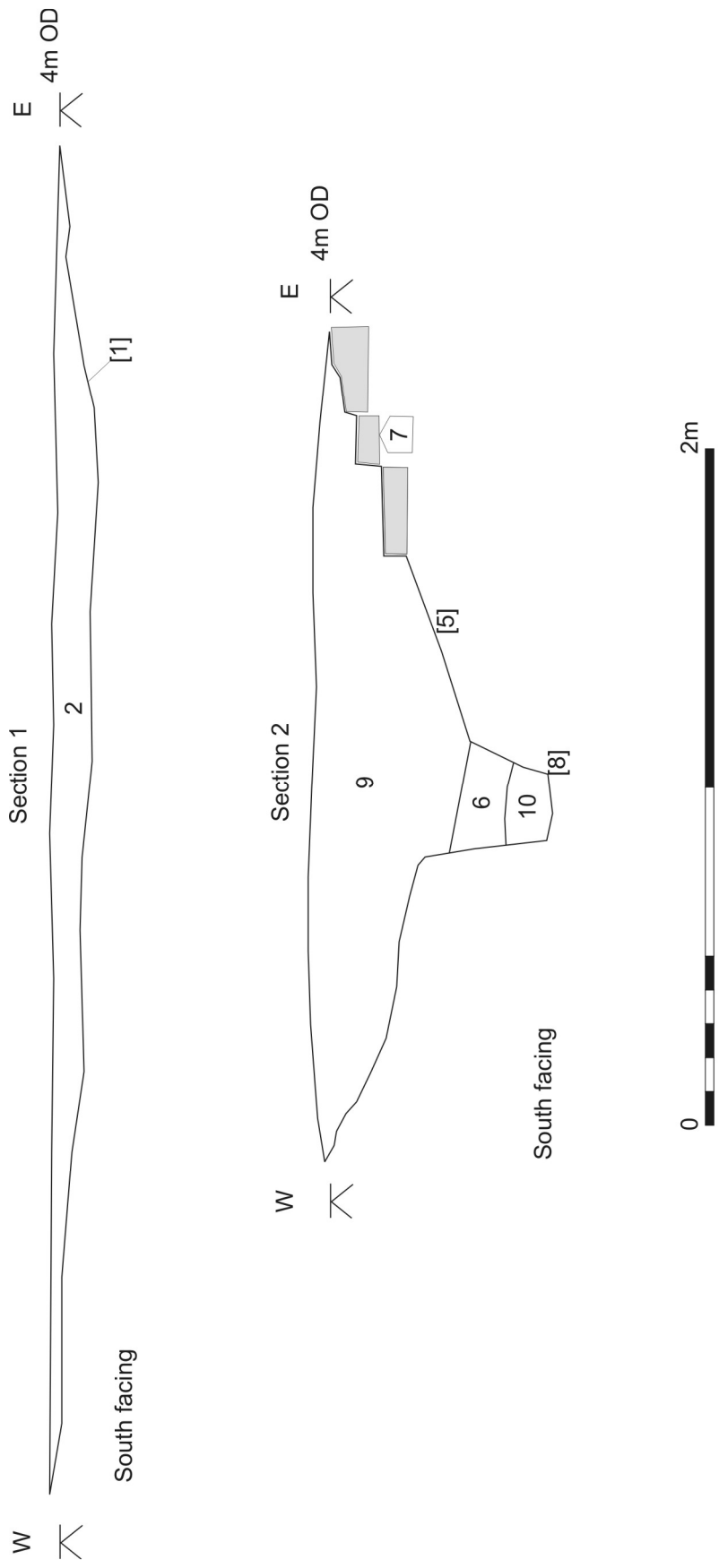


Figure 3. Sections 1 and 2. Scale 1:20



Plate 1. Shallow hollow [1] looking north.



Plate 2. Shallow hollow [1] looking east.



Plate 3. Pit [5] looking north.



Plate 4. Pit [5] looking east. Close up of brick structure [7].